

TIPOFF

TUESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2014

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PAGE T4

K-State must right ship to stay relevant in conference race

By JOHN ZETMEIR
THE COLLEGIAN

Head coach Bruce Weber said it best when he said it's gut-check week for his squad. Not only did the Wildcats drop two straight games to nationally ranked teams, they came up just short in both contests.

"You were close and that's what kind of eats at your gut that you didn't get it done," Weber said.

The Wildcats sat in second place in the Big 12 this time last week. However, after close road losses to both Texas and Iowa State, the Wildcats are at the point where their season could be sitting on a teeter totter.

"Usually around this time, teams either go north or south," junior forward Nino Williams said Monday night. "Tomorrow is probably the biggest game of the season."

It is all about the next game for this Wildcat squad. K-State still has games remaining against Kansas, Oklahoma State and Texas just to name a few. But none of those games against highly ranked opponents is happening this week. If the Wildcats get caught up in what is down the road, they could be one of those teams that travel south in the Big 12 standings.

"Tomorrow is probably the biggest game of the season."

NINO WILLIAMS
JUNIOR FORWARD, K-STATE MEN'S BASKETBALL

Most teams in the country have played around 20 games in their season. Every game, every practice is a grind from this point out. For a Wildcat team that has three freshmen within their top six in minutes played per game, they must show that they will go north through this grind.

It all starts with freshman guard Marcus Foster. The Texas native has been asked to do a lot this season for the Wildcats, but he must continue to play at a high level. The Wildcats are undefeated at home this season when Foster hits the double-digit point total.

Texas Tech is a team that the Wildcats have found a lot of success against lately. No one on Weber's squad has lost to the Red



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN

Raiders during their time at K-State. Despite that stat and Tech's 10-10 record, the Wildcats understand that the Red Raiders can not be overlooked.

"Texas Tech is a dangerous team," Weber said. "Like everyone in the league, I think they are capable of beating people. Not only have they stomped on Baylor, but every game they played was close."

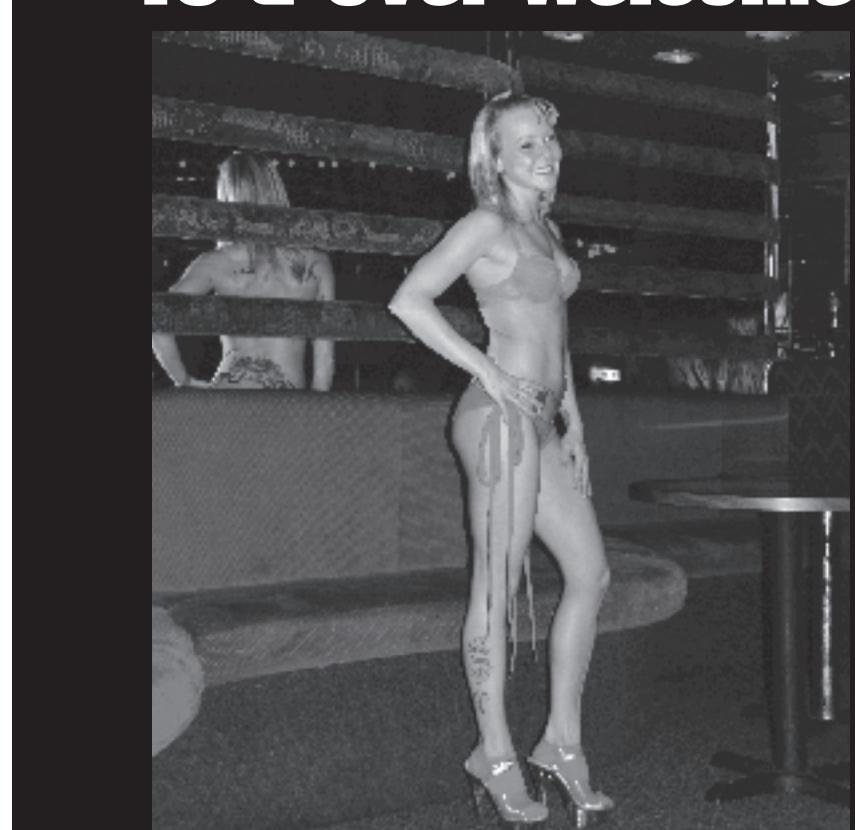
This year's Wildcat team is no stranger to adversity. Starting the season with a loss to Northern Colorado, along with two other losses in their first five games, K-State needed to grow up quickly. They did, winning 12 of their next 13 games. They must now respond to two consecutive losses for the second time this season.

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Head coach Bruce Weber instructs his team during an official replay in the second half of K-State's 81-75 loss to the Cyclones.



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Freshman guard Jevon Thomas goes up for a layup and is fouled by ISU guard Naz Long during the second half of K-State's 81-75 loss to the Cyclones Jan. 25 in Hilton Coliseum in Ames, Iowa. The Wildcats were down 52-55 with 9:59 remaining when Thomas made one of his two following free throws.

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TIPOFF

7 p.m. Bramlage Coliseum



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN
Senior guard Shane Southwell attempts a jumper during the second half of the Wildcats' 81-75 loss to Iowa State Saturday in Hilton Coliseum in Ames, Iowa.

Cats look to secure win against Tech

By TATE STEINLAGE
THE COLLEGIAN

Bramlage Coliseum will play host to two teams on the Big 12 stumbling block Tuesday, as the K-State men's basketball team (14-6, 4-3 Big 12) welcomes in the Texas Tech Red Raiders (10-10, 2-5 Big 12).

Consecutive road losses to the Texas Longhorns and Iowa State Cyclones have pushed the Wildcats out of the Associated Press Top 25 and down to fifth in the tight Big 12 conference race. The two-game conference skid is the first for the team since this time last year, and just the second under head coach Bruce Weber.

The Wildcats return home where they have yet to drop a conference game (3-0), and are averaging just over six points more than the road for the entire season.

"I think defensively, we are phenomenal at home," junior forward Nino Williams said. "On the road, it gets loud and we don't communicate well. The game is faster paced on the road."

K-State will once again look to their "big three" of freshman guard Marcus Foster, junior forward Thomas Gipson and senior guard Shane Southwell to break the streak.

Foster, who led the Wildcats in scoring all year at

14.0 points per game, returned to form Saturday with a stat-stuffing performance that included 20 points, five rebounds, three assists and two steals. It was the freshman's 16th game in double-digits, and arguably the most notable having been on the road in a hostile environment.

In the two games prior to Saturday, Thomas Gipson was averaging 22 points and six rebounds. The Cyclones were able to keep the 6-foot-7-inch man quiet on the offensive end, however, as the junior finished the afternoon with just four points and one offensive rebound.

"(Gipson) didn't score the ball and then he let it effect the rest of his game," head coach Bruce Weber said about Gipson's performance against Iowa State.

The constant for K-State in Saturday's loss at Iowa State, and dating back to Jan. 18, has been Southwell. The senior leader is averaging 15.8 points per game in his last four contests, including a 20-point effort against West Virginia on 60 percent shooting.

While the Wildcats and Red Raiders' "big three" is junior guard Robert Turner. The former junior college standout is averaging just over 10 points per game, and is leading the team in assists with 2.8 per game.

And rounding out the Red Raiders' "big three" is junior forward Jordan Tolbert. The Texas native is averaging right at 12.0 points per game this season on nearly 60 percent shooting. Tolbert has also been productive on the glass, averaging 6.4 rebounds per game.

Like the Wildcats, Texas Tech enters Tuesday's contest on their own two-game conference skid. The Red Raiders fell to West Virginia on the road last Wednesday, 87-81, before dropping a game against Oklahoma 74-65 in Lubbock on Saturday.



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN
Senior forward **Shane Southwell** replies to comments from the Cyclone crowd as he walks toward the locker room following K-State's loss to the Cyclones last Saturday in Ames, Iowa.

By the Numbers

BY AUSTIN EARL
THE COLLEGIAN

A look at K-State's upcoming game against Texas Tech by the numbers.

0 Texas Tech wins against ranked foes

Texas Tech had a nice win in Lubbock, Texas, against Baylor when the Bears were No. 12 in the country. But Baylor has since fallen, losing five of their last six games, falling to 1-5 in conference play.

4 Number of Will Spradling 3-pointers against Iowa State

Having another scorer from the outside is key for the Wildcats. Spradling has a chance to prove

that his game on Saturday was not an anomaly against a Texas Tech team that does not defend the perimeter well.

16.6 The average points per game of freshman guard Marcus Foster in Big 12 games at Bramlage Coliseum

Foster has been a huge factor in the Wildcats being undefeated at home in conference play. He has also been more efficient in Manhattan against Big 12 teams than he has on the road. The Wildcats are at their best when Foster is hitting shots.

56 Jaye Crockett's shooting percentage

Tech forward Jaye Crockett ranks in the top 40 in the country in

shooting percentage. The 6-foot-7-inch forward is very good at getting the ball in the basket when he is inside the lane. If the Red Raiders can create space to get him the ball, he could have a big night in Bramlage. Against an undersized Wildcat team, Crockett could cause havoc for K-State at the post.

73.4 The number of points per game that the Texas Tech Red Raiders score

The Red Raiders rank 135th in the nation in points per game. They are the lowest ranked team in that category that the Wildcats have faced since they played TCU earlier in the month.

PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN
Freshman forward **Marcus Foster** attacks the rim during the first half of K-State's 81-75 loss to the Cyclones. Foster finished with 20 points, his highest total since posting 25 points against Oral Roberts on Nov. 13.

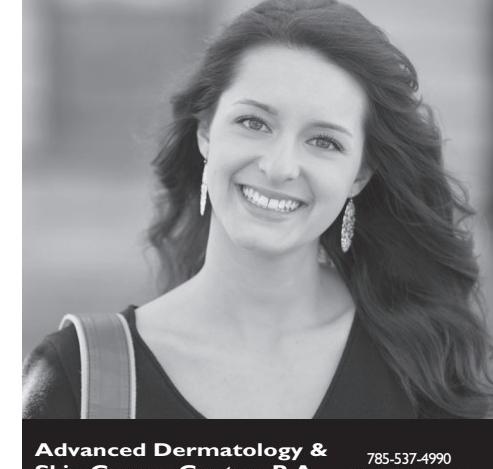


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Matching Up: Texas Tech Red Raiders vs. K-State Wildcats



SPENCER LOW
THE COLLEGIAN

game at one point.

Thomas has been a spark plug for K-State since his debut in December. His crisp passing and ability to drive to the hole forces defenses to give him plenty of attention with the ball in his hands. He leads the team with 3.8 assists per game and has a 4.25 assist-to-turnover ratio, which would lead the Big 12 by a long shot if he qualified.

Player to Watch for Texas Tech: Dusty Hannahs

Hannahs is one of the best three point shooters in the Big 12 this season, connecting on 42.1 percent of his shots behind the arc, good for fourth in the Big 12. Last season in Bramlage he led the Red Raiders with 14 points as a freshman, so look for him to have another good game on the perimeter for Texas Tech.

Crockett is having a fantastic year, leading the Big 12 in shooting percentage at 56 percent, which is a huge reason that the senior is ninth in the conference with 14.3 points per game. He has put up double digit scoring in all but three games this season, and has been stellar in conference play, averaging 15.6 points per game.

Frontcourt: Texas Tech

Texas Tech has a couple of 6'7" forwards in Jaye Crockett and Jordan Tolbert who are first and second on the team in scoring, respectively, combining for over 26 points and 12 rebounds per game. Joining them is seven footer Dejan Kravic, who has blocked 25 shots this season, averaging 1.3 per game. Together, the three provide a stout frontcourt that can score, rebound, and play solid defense.

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Backcourt: K-State

Freshman guard Marcus Foster is coming off a 20 point game at Iowa State and has led K-State to scoring for most of the season. While an injured finger has caused a decrease in effectiveness, Foster still found a way to make a big impact last Saturday against the Cyclones, an averaging 14 points a game, which is 14th-best in the Big 12.

Foster is joined by senior Will Spradling and fellow freshman Jevon Thomas in a talented set of guards. Spradling had a great day in Ames as well, converting four of six three-point attempts, including three straight to get the Wildcats back in the

game at one point.

Thomas has been a spark plug for K-State since his debut in December. His crisp passing and ability to drive to the hole forces defenses to give him plenty of attention with the ball in his hands. He leads the team with 3.8 assists per game and has a 4.25 assist-to-turnover ratio, which would lead the Big 12 by a long shot if he qualified.

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Player to Watch for K-State: Thomas Gipson

After a poor showing against Iowa State, K-State's junior forward will be looking for a big comeback in front of a home crowd.

Gipson struggled to assert himself in the face of frequent double teams and a roaring crowd in Ames against Iowa State, so a return home should help him some.

His 12.1 points per game are second on the team, and he leads the Wildcats with 6.2 boards per game. After missing time early this season, Gipson has been one of K-State's most important players, and they will need him to show up against Texas Tech's talented frontcourt if they want to climb out of a three-game losing streak.

Spencer Low is a senior in political science. Please send all comments to sports@kstatecollegian.com.



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN
Junior forward **Thomas Gipson** tries to grab an offensive rebound from ISU forward **Melvin Ejim** during the second half of K-State's 81-75 loss to the Cyclones last Saturday in Hilton Coliseum in Ames, Iowa.

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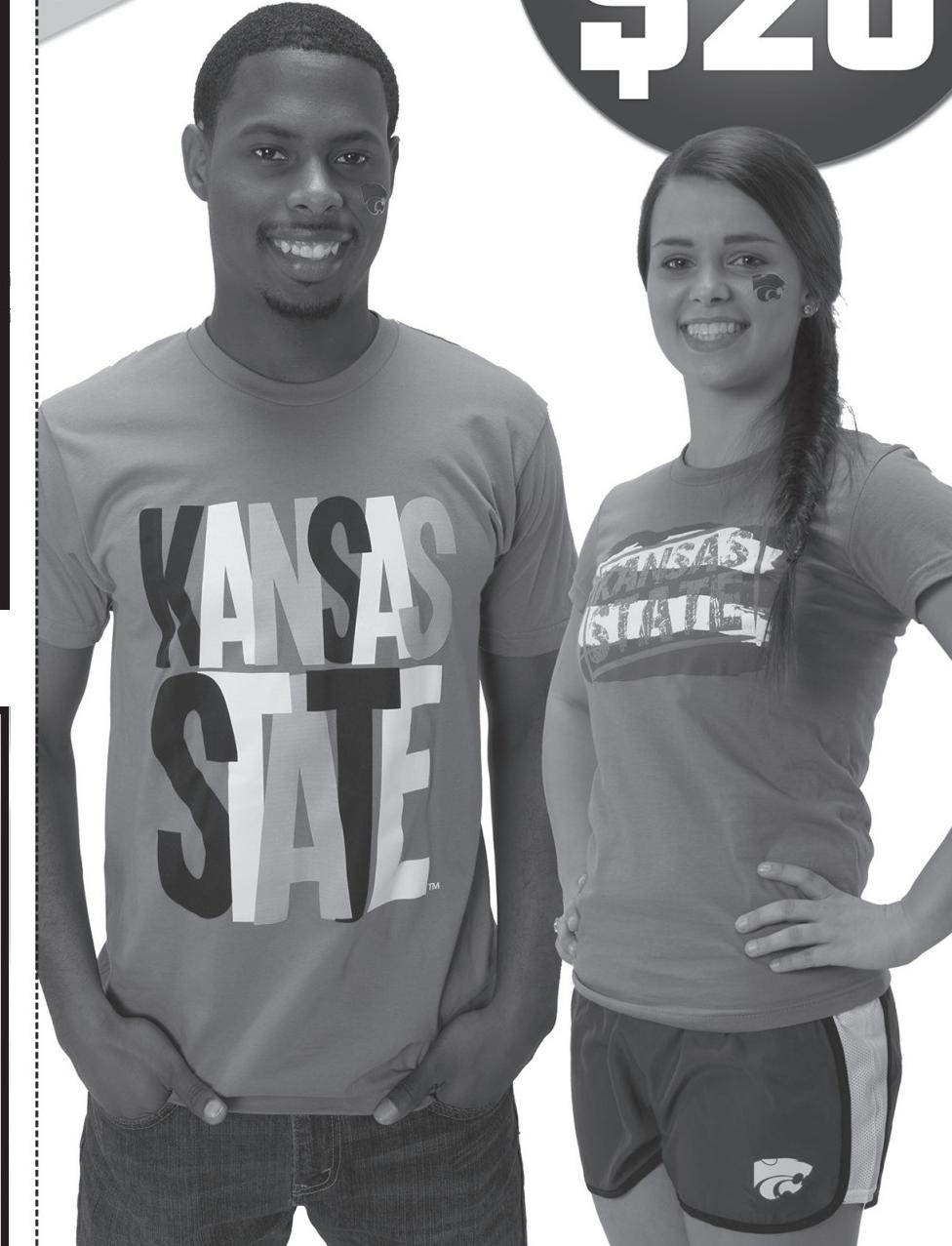
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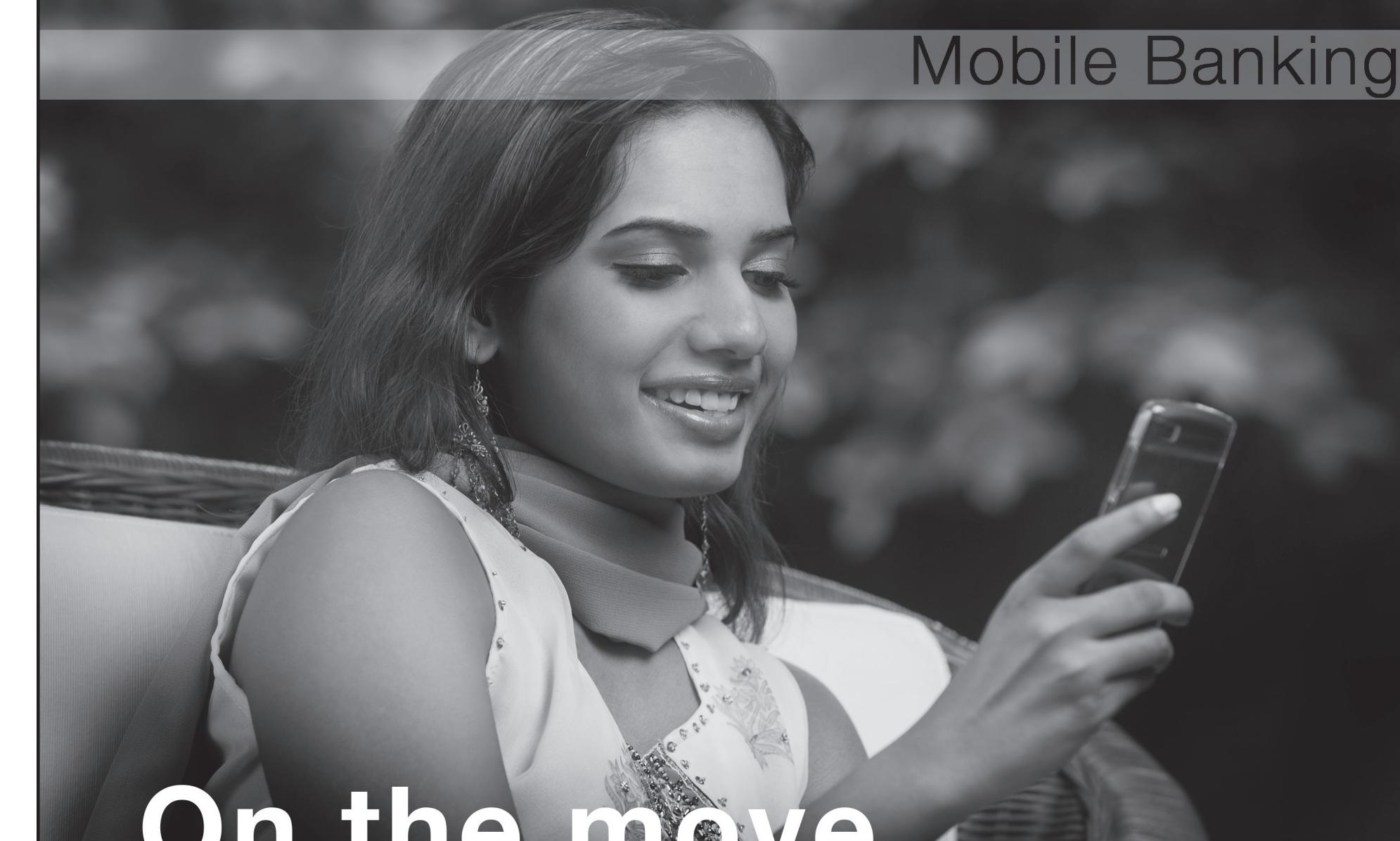
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